



WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

**PROPOSALS BY BLACKBURN UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB,
MURRAYFIELD PARK, BLACKBURN**

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Committee of proposals being promoted by Blackburn United Football Club and to present officers views on how those proposals should be taken forward.

B. RECOMMENDATION

Committee is recommended to note the proposals being promoted by Blackburn United Football Club and to authorise officers to work with the Club in identifying an alternative scheme that will satisfy the long-term objectives of both parties.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

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| I Council Values | Making the best use of our resources.

Working in partnership.

Being honest, open and accountable. |
| II Policy and Legal | Open Space Strategy – policy seriously compromised. |
| III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property) | The Club's proposals would see Murrayfield Park sold for housing development and existing public open space used as the site for new purpose-built sporting facilities. |
| IV Consultations | The local members have been provided with a copy of this paper for information.
NETS and land services
Education and cultural services
Strategic planning |

D. TERMS OF REPORT

Murrayfield Park in Blackburn (shown cross-hatched in black on the attached plan) is owned by West Lothian Council and it is let to Blackburn United Football Club under a ground lease that runs until 2021. Under the terms of that lease, the club pays a nominal ground rent of £25 per annum. They are however responsible for the repair, maintenance and upkeep of the park and the buildings situated thereon.

The Club is seeking to secure its long-term future by becoming a recognised Community Football Club and by ultimately gaining associate membership of the Scottish Football Association. In order to do that, their existing facilities would require to be substantially upgraded. The Club has produced a report entitled "Uniting Blackburn Football in the Community" that sets out how, in an ideal world, they would like to take their Club forward.

In summary, the Club's proposals would see them move from Murrayfield Park to new purpose built facilities on a nearby area of Council-owned land. These new facilities would be used jointly by the football club and the wider local community. The proposed new facilities would be located within the area shown hatched in black on the attached plan.

A Director of local house-builders M&M Homes Limited, has connections with the Club and is fronting their proposals. He has met with Council officials to discuss the practicalities of Club's proposals and these have been described as follows.

M&M Homes would build the new facilities in exchange for being given title to Murrayfield Park. M&M Homes would then develop that site for private housing. This proposal would be subject to a specification for the new facilities being agreed and costed and a market valuation of Murrayfield Park being undertaken to ensure parity in the respective values.

The Club's proposals would see significant changes to a very prominent and historically important area of the village. The Council would be involved in this scheme on a number of fronts - as landowner, planning, education and other functions. The views of the appropriate Council officers have therefore been gathered and the concerns arising are as follows.

Under the criteria set out in the Council's Open Space Strategy, the village of Blackburn currently shows a deficit of public open spaces. Implementation of the Club's proposals would see this deficit increase further due to additional development on existing public open space sites, and in particular seriously reduce the neighbourhood park as a major accessible park facility from the community.

The Club's proposal hinges upon Murrayfield Park being developed for commercial housing. That site is however designated as public open space in the finalised West Lothian Local Plan (2005) and as such any new housing development on this site would be contrary to that Plan.

Education Services have confirmed that existing secondary school rolls in the Blackburn area cannot currently support any new residential development, other than on those sites already designated for future housing use in the Finalised Local Plan. In June 2008 the Education Executive agreed a strategy to support implementation of the Local Plan that included extensions to 3 secondary schools, including Bathgate Academy. The report acknowledged that capacity released for new residential development would however most likely be limited to key town centre sites. It also noted that catchment reviews and pupil placement policy review were needed alongside building extensions.

There are also issues related to other council properties in the area being redeveloped in connection with the proposed Blackburn Partnership Centre, and the need to ensure that the council satisfies its statutory obligations in respect of any assets which it intends to dispose of in connection with any redevelopment.

E. CONCLUSION

For the reasons outlined above, the proposals being promoted by Blackburn United Football Club cannot be taken forward in their present form. There is however a willingness to see the Club's long-term future secured and as such it is recommended that Council officers should continue to engage with Club officials in an attempt to identify a possible acceptable alternative. These considerations should take cognisance of the wider development proposals for the area including the proposed partnership centre.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Report by Blackburn United Football Club entitled "Uniting Blackburn Football in the Community" held at Lammermuir House.

Appendices/Attachments: Location plan

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